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Why farmers are still burning stubble despite fines, government assistance

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There is a visible reduction in the volume of post-harvest stubble-burning in Punjab and Haryana this year owing to the promotion of farm machinery backed by financial assistance by government and awareness programmes.

Yet, a significant chunk of farmers are still reluctant to use the Happy Seeder — which obviates the need for stubble burning — fearing lower yields. And this fear, coupled with the high cost of the machines, seems to override the fear of penal action for burning stubble.

Many farmers in these states take land on lease — by paying up to Rs 60,000 per acre — which leaves them with small leeway to think about the Happy Seeder, as they assume lower yields translate into huge losses for them.

However, the fear of a lower output has no factual or legitimate basis, say experts in the field, even as they feel all farmers would adopt new techniques in due course of time.

Conceived by the Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) in 2007-08, Happy Seeder, which allows sowing without removing stubble, is seen as a perfect alternative as it completely rules out the possibility of straw burning.

The machine is expensive at Rs 150,000, despite the 50 percent subsidy which brings down the cost to over Rs 75,000.